

PATENT
032001-033

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ADAPTIVE SCHEDULING OF FUNCTION CALLS IN DYNAMIC RECONFIGURABLE LOGIC

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to hardware acceleration of software code in a
15 dynamic reconfigurable computing systems.

State of the Art

The execution of a computer software program may be accelerated by converting sections of the software code that are most frequently executed into ***Function Calls*** that are implemented or assisted in hardware. Traditionally, the partitioning of total system logic into separate hardware and software portions for respective implementations is determined early in the architecture design stage. However, implementing application specific logic in hardware can be time-consuming and expansive. As a result, hardware acceleration has been limited to cases that are generic and obvious.

Moreover, a majority of software programs are written in high-level program languages, such as C and Java. These programs are translated via a compiler into machine instructions targeted for a specific processor. Because of this isolation of software programming from target processor architecture, opportunities for hardware acceleration specific to a software program are traditionally not materialized.

With Dynamic Reconfigurable Logic, such as described in U.S. Patent No. 5,970,254 entitled "An Integrated Processor and Programmable Data Path Chip for

Reconfigurable Computing," the above-mentioned acceleration opportunities can be easily and economically materialized. A method as such is described in U.S. Patent No. 5,966,534 entitled "Method for Compiling High Level Programming Languages into an Integrated Processor with Reconfigurable Logic." Pertaining to this method,

5 a software program is analyzed by a software tool, known as profiler, to target the most frequently executed codes for hardware acceleration. Code segments thus identified, known as **Hard Functions**, are extracted and implemented in Reconfigurable Logic via a series of transformation and logic synthesis tools to generate *Configuration Bits* which configure the *Reconfigurable Logic Hardware* to

10 perform the exact functions of the original code segments are generated.

A reconfigurable system may consist of multiple reconfigurable hardware units, known as **Fabric Partitions**, each can be programmed independently. When necessary, more than one partition may be "chained" together to accommodate a

15 given *Hard Function*. To execute a *Hard Function*, its *Configuration Bits* must be pre-stored in a designated on-chip memory area, known as **Configuration Memory**. The *Configuration Memory* may retain one *active* entry, called **Active Plane**, plus several *Shadow* entries, called **Docking Planes**, of *Configuration Bits*. The *Docking Planes* provide concurrent loading of *Configuration Bits* for *Hard*

20 *Functions* that are to be executed next, in the background while the *Fabric Partition* is executing off the *Active Plane*. When a *Fabric Partition* concludes executing the current *Active Plan*, the contents of any one of the *Docking Planes* can be transferred to the *Active Plane* and then be activated (for execution) instantly. It is essential that the *Hard Function* to be executed has its *Configuration Bits* pre-

25 fetched to a *Docking Plane*, or else, the system would be idle while waiting for the *Configuration Bits* to arrive, causing system throughput to suffer. To a degree, this problem can be partially answered by having the execution flow of the software program analyzed to determine the point of pre-fetching for each *Hard Function*. However, in general, there are more sets of *Configuration Bit* candidates for pre-

fetching than there are *Docking Planes*. Consequently, it becomes necessary to choose, perhaps based on benchmark statistics, the best candidates to pre-fetch. Yet, the best choices are not always obvious, the reasons are:

1. Best choices are, more likely than not, sensitive to real-time input data streams. Static scheduling, as described above, is likely misled by average values. For example, a function called following an event 100% of the time over half of the runtime and occurring 0% over the other half would show a 50% chance of being called after the event. This would imply a fixed 50% schedule miss, even though zero miss could be easily achieved.
2. Hardware acceleration does not always produce better throughput. If a function stays active only briefly, it can't justify the overhead incurred in pre-fetching. However, the duration of a function staying active is not generally static.
3. Static scheduling, by default, has to be conservative. Borderline cases would have to be discarded, performance gain opportunities may not be fully realized.

With dynamic reconfiguration capability in the system, code segments identified as ***Function Calls*** can be thought of as having all their *Configuration Bits* kept in unlimited numbers of ***Virtual Programmable Logic Fabric Partitions*** (or simply, ***Virtual Partitions***). *Virtual Partitions* are kept in secondary storage areas and are fetched into real *Fabric Partitions* just in time for execution. The scheme, in concept, is similar to a Virtual Memory popular in computer architectures. As a result, more code can thus be serviced for hardware acceleration in this virtual environment. A method that supports the storage organization needed for *Virtual Partitions* is described in Attorney docket No. 032001-008 entitled "An On-chip Memory Architecture and Design Methodology Supporting the Conversion of High Level Source Code into Reconfigurable Logic Gates."

Although similar in concept, *Virtual Partitions* require a scheduling algorithm that differs significantly to that of a Virtual Memory. A virtual memory segment is fetched into real memory space based on a scheme called demand paging. That is, in essence, the fetching of memory content from virtual space to real is
5 triggered by its absence when addressed. But, when that happens, the system fetches data on a wholesale basis, that is, not just the data items, but a whole block of memory containing those items. This scheme is effective for virtual memory because memory usage tends to be localized. Such locality cannot be assumed with *Virtual Partition*. As a result, fetching of *Virtual Partitions* must be scheduled in advance.

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The purpose of scheduling is to optimize the usage of the real *Fabric Partitions* for maximal performance gain. A method of such scheduling is described in U.S. Patent No. 5,966,534 entitled "Method for Compiling High Level Programming Languages into an Integrated Processor with Reconfigurable Logic."
15 In this method, scheduling instructions are explicitly inserted into software program code. In other words, the scheduling is **static** even though *Hard Functions* are called dynamically, sensitive to input data streams. The advantage of a *static scheduling* method as this one is in its simplicity. However, performance penalty incurred with a schedule miss is so excessive, scheduling has to be on the
20 conservative side in this method. As a result, the potential of hardware acceleration may not be fully achieved.

The present invention comprises a generalized scheduling method, in which scheduling of *Configuration Bits* pre-fetching is dynamic and adaptive to real-time execution patterns. This method improves system throughput by minimizing both
25 schedule misses and the penalty incurred with a schedule miss. In addition, user interactions with the system is simplified. Finally, in a *Training Mode* included in the present invention, a software program can "train" its scheduling to become more and more effective, learning from real-time samples, and thus, eliminate some of the

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

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result, the system will never have to stall.

In a second aspect of the present invention, a hierarchy of memory storage devices with incremental access latency is employed to stage the *Configuration Bits* of individual *Hard Functions* to arrive at the *Configuration Memory* in time when a function is called. This hierarchy may include any combination among a wide range of memory storage devices, such as ROM, hard disk, dedicated area of main memory, dedicated SRAM used as *Configuration Buffer*, on-chip memory used as *Configuration Cache*, etc. These devices mimic *Configuration Memory* and extend real *Reconfigurable Logic Hardware* into virtually an unlimited number of *Virtual Partitions*. The *Configuration Bits* from each *Hard Function* in a software program is assigned to a *Virtual Partition*. Initially, all *Virtual Partitions* are stored in a non-volatile device, e.g. disk. Over time, they are copied over up the ladder of the staging hierarchy, in pace with its estimated time of need. Optimally, a given *Virtual Partition* needs to be in a stage where the composite latency is within its estimated time of need. By the same token, a *Virtual Partition* can be retracted from a stage where its estimated time of need falls behind the composite latency of the previous stage. In this way, a *Virtual Partition* is assured to be within reach for the *Hard Execution*, but not tying up resources prematurely. In cases when the number of *Virtual Partitions* asserted to be at a certain stage exceeds the capacity of that stage device, priority is asserted based on the calculation of expected performance gain on individual *Virtual Partitions*.

In a third aspect of the present invention, a *Call History Model* of *Hard Function Calls* in a software program is established for the basis of scheduling. In the *Model*, each *call-site* of a *Hard Function* is included as a *Function Call*. Associated with each *Function Call* is a list of probable *next-calls*, which track the call history following this call. In the present invention, an adaptive method is used to trace all history instead of the prior art pre-processing analysis technique of

establishing call history. The basis of the adaptive method is founded on *duality in implementation* and because a schedule miss is not as detrimental as it would be otherwise. This allows the system to learn from its previous hits and misses dynamically. Also included in the *Call History Model* is statistical data reflecting the execution trends of a *Function Call*, in terms of frequency of use, performance gain, and execution duration. The statistical data is used to estimate time of need and expected gain for the staging of *Virtual Partitions*.

In a fourth aspect of the present invention, scheduling of *Hard Function Calls* is **adaptive** to the real-time call pattern of the application. At the start-up time for a given software program, an initial *Call History Model* is loaded so as to start up the staging process of *Virtual Partitions*. The initial *Call History Model* can be one constructed by a pre-processor analyzing benchmark input data. Alternatively, the *Call History Model* can be saved from a previous run. The statistical content of the *Model* can then be updated dynamically, coincident upon actual activation of *Function Calls* in an application. The method also includes heuristics that fine-tune the scheduling *processes*. For instance, *probabilities* associated with *next-calls* are adjusted dynamically, where the weight of adjustment can itself be adjusted empirically.

In a fifth aspect of the present invention, a ***Demand Look-Ahead*** scheme is devised to look for *Virtual Partitions* that will be needed several steps ahead. For instance, a current call F_A may be followed by a call F_B 50% of the time and a call F_C 50% of the time, while F_B and F_C are both followed by call F_D 100% of the time. This makes call F_D a sure bid one call remote from the current call F_A . In this aspect, the system traverses the *next-calls* lists several levels down to obtain a snapshot of the composite demands of all *Virtual Partitions*, then positions them in the staging hierarchy accordingly. Although copying *Virtual Partitions* from place to place increases system activities, those activities are done in the background and

thus present no impact to system throughput.

In a sixth aspect of the present invention, the system optionally includes a ***Training Mode*** in which the system starts up without an initial *Call History Model* and constructs such a *Model* on-the-fly. The adaptive nature of the present invention makes the self-training possible, and thus simplifies user interaction with the system.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention may be further understood from the following written description in conjunction with the appended drawings. In the drawings:

Fig. 1 shows an overview of an exemplary *Reconfigurable Logic Fabric*;

Fig. 2 shows the general structure of a *Function Call*;

Fig. 3 shows the activation flow of a *Function Call*;

Fig. 4 shows the extension of *Fabric Partitions* into virtual space;

Fig. 5 shows an exemplary staging hierarchy for *Virtual Partitions*;

Fig. 6 shows the address scheme for *Virtual Partitions*;

Fig. 7 shows the schematics of a *FCT (Function Call Table)*;

Fig. 8 shows the schematics of a *VPM (Virtual Partition Map)*;

Fig. 9 shows the *incremental tasking* of the scheduling processes;

Fig. 10 shows an example of a *next-calls fanout tree*.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

In accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention, given a program source code written in a high level language such as C-language, each code segment identified for hardware acceleration is handled as a *Hard Function*. A computer implemented behavior synthesis method (described in U.S. Patent No. 5,970,254 referenced above) is then used to implement each *Hard Function* in

hardware suitable for the *Reconfigurable Logic Hardware* (described in U.S. Patent No. 5,970,254 referenced above). An overview of an exemplary system 10 including *Reconfigurable Logic Fabric* is shown in Fig. 1. In general, the system includes typical processing system elements such as a peripheral interface controller 11, the external memory interface 12, a PCI bus 13, a system bus 14, system level function elements 15 and general purpose I/O 16. The system further includes an embedded processor 17 and a *Reconfigurable Logic Fabric* 18 including a plurality of *Fabric Partitions* 19. Each *Fabric Partition* may be implemented to have an associated data path portion 20, local memory portion 21, central logic 22, and *Configuration Memory* 23 as shown in Figure 1. In one embodiment, the data portion is made up of a plurality of programmable multi-function datapath units (DPUs), not shown, as described in U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/307,072, filed May 7, 1999.

In prior art techniques, a *Hard Function* is identified and extracted from the software program on a boundary that coincides with the reconfigurable hardware. With the present invention, this restriction is removed; a *Hard Function* is situated on its natural functional boundary, which means a *Hard Function* may glue together one or more *Fabric Calls* (sub-units that observe hardware boundary) as one functional entity. In other words, a *Hard Function*, no matter how many calls it transfers to hardware, is to be compiled, optimized and scheduled together as one unit.

A *Hard Function*, like a software subroutine, may be invoked from multiple *call-sites* in a software program. Each *call-site* is dealt with uniquely as a *Function Call*. Even though multiple *Function Calls* of a given *Hard Function* involve the same set of *Fabric Calls*, the data communication surrounding the calls may not be identical. Distinguishing between each *Function Call* has the advantage of allowing a compiler to streamline data traffic locally. However, the distinction between a

Hard Function and a *Function Call* is, in fact, an artificial one, and hence we will herein use the two terms indiscriminately. As shown in Fig. 2, a *Function Call* 24 is composed of one or more *Fabric Calls* 25A, surrounded by code that directs the data traffic to and from the *Fabric Calls*. For instance, Fig. 2 shows code 25B
5 outside of each *Fabric Call* code. All *Function Calls* invoking the same *Hard Function* employ the same set of *Fabric Calls*.

When a software program source code is compiled by a compiler customized for the present invention, each *Function Call* is compiled with *dual implementation*,
10 a *Soft* implementation and a *Hard* implementation. Firstly, in a *Soft* implementation path, the whole function is compiled for execution in the embedded processor 17 (Fig. 1) as if *Fabric Call* boundaries don't exist. Secondly, in a *Hard* implementation path, *Fabric Calls* are replaced by code that transfers the execution of *Fabric Calls* to hardware by activating the corresponding *Configuration Bits*. In
15 parallel of the software program, each *Fabric Call* is also synthesized by a synthesis tool to generate the corresponding *Configuration Bits*. For instance, the code between the beginning and ending *Fabric Call Statements* are converted into a known hardware description language such as RTL or HDL. A behavioral synthesis tool such as described in U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/307,174 then
20 converts the hardware description language into the corresponding *Configuration Bits*. Finally, both *Soft* and *Hard* implementations are assembled together to allow alternate branching to invoke either or both of the implementations subject to runtime conditions or options.

25 There are three-fold objectives with this *duality in implementation*. First of all, the software program can continue executing the *Soft* implementation, without having to wait for miss-scheduled *Configuration Bits*. Secondly, it facilitates the verification of the *Hard* implementation against the *Soft* implementation, since both of them can be invoked in parallel and have their results compared at the end.

Thirdly, it allows the system to self-tune its scheduling for *Function Calls*, adaptive to the incoming data stream, to maximize system throughput.

Fig. 3 shows a flowchart illustrating the *Activation Flow* of a *Function Call* and the concept of duality in implementation. Fig. 3 shows that when each *Fabric Call Statement* is encountered in the software program, a scheduling decision (28) is made as to whether it will be a *Hard Execution* or *Soft Execution*. If the configuration bits are in place (29) (i.e., loaded into the memory areas as will be described herein below), *Hard Execution* is initiated (30). The CPU executes the program (31) and, when it encounters a BEGIN_FABRIC_MACRO statement, the *Fabric Partitions* (19) are used to perform the *Hard Execution* and then return to the software program at the end of each macro to continue the flow of the *Function Call* as executed by the CPU (32-35). If the scheduling decision (28) determines that a *Soft Execution* should be performed, or if the *Configuration Bits* are not in place (29), *Soft Execution* is initiated (36). In this case the BEGIN_FABRIC_MACRO and the END_FABRIC_MACRO statements are ignored and the code between these statements are executed by the embedded processor. In one embodiment during a diagnostic mode (37), both of the *Soft* and *Hard Executions* are performed after which the statistical data is compared.

Expanded from the self-tuning aspect, in one embodiment of the present invention, a *Training Mode* (39) can be included to bring a software program up cold, starting out all *Function Calls* in *Soft Executions*, but gradually switching to *Hard Executions* for ones that are found having the most impact to system throughput. In this case, if the system is in *Training Mode* (39) statistical data is logged and a statistical profile (40) is developed for each *Function Call*.

No matter which mode is being implemented, at the end of the execution of the *Function Call* the *Function Call Table (FCT)*, which includes statistical data

relating to the execution of the *Function Call* is updated (41).

Function Call

Fig. 1 shows a general structure of a *Function Call* in one embodiment of the present invention. As shown, a *Function Call* is enclosed by a pair of special statements: a *BEGIN-FUNCTION-CALL* 26A in the front and an *END-FUNCTION-CALL* 26B at the end. Within the *Function Call*, each sub-segment targeted for hardware implementation is enclosed by a second pair of special statements: a *BEGIN-FABRIC-MACRO* 27A in the front and an *END-FABRIC-MACRO* 27B at the end. Optionally, a *PRELOAD-FABRIC-MACRO* statement (not shown) can be used to pre-fetch *Fabric Calls* in advance of the *BEGIN-FABRIC-MACRO* statement. Thus, a *Function Call*, may include portions that are to be converted to hardware and portions that are not, which in its entirety coincides with a natural boundary of the program function. Two advantages are achieved with this *Function Call* format. First, code changes to a software program are kept minimal to adopt the system and method of the present invention. Second, sections of code can be isolated as *Fabric Calls* automatically, while having the remaining code optimized for streamlining data traffic and maximizing system throughput. The compiler can invoke special hardware resources, for instance DMA channels, to achieve such optimization.

In one exemplary embodiment, the two enclosing *Function Call* statements 26A and 26B are translated by the compiler into codes that initiate the system for a sequence of runtime actions, including:

1. Determining whether *Hard* implementation or *Soft* implementation of the *Function Call* is to be activated, or both as in training or diagnostic mode;
2. Initiate special *runtime service routines*, if in training or diagnostic mode, to track input data, log output data, and compare data resulted from *Soft* and *Hard Executions*; and
3. Initiate a sequence of scheduling tasks to update statistics of the *Function*

Calls, look ahead to identify among probable *next-calls* the most likely candidates to line up for *Hard Execution*, and "move" their respective *Virtual Partitions* in a hierarchy of storage devices.

5 Similarly, the two *Fabric Call* statements are translated into codes that signal system hardware to activate or deactivate specific *Configuration Bits* for execution. The system actions of the above special statements are illustrated in Fig. 3.

Virtual Partition

10 In a reconfigurable computing system, there are a finite number of *Fabric Partitions* 19 (Fig. 1). Each can be programmed independently, and several consecutive *Fabric Partitions* may be "chained" to accommodate a particular function. In the present invention, a *Virtual Partition* carries one real partition worth of *Configuration Bits* for a *Fabric Call*, and likewise, several *Virtual Partitions* may
15 be chained to mirror image the chaining of real fabrics. *Virtual Partitions* are stored in a persistent and non-volatile storage, such as disk, ROM, etc. There is practically no limit as how many *Virtual Partitions* there can be, as many as it takes in a software program. The concept of *Virtual Partitions* is shown in Fig. 4.

20 As shown in Fig. 4, initially a software program 42 is evaluated and *Fabric Calls* 43 are identified so as to generate the *Virtual Partitions* 44. The *Virtual Partitions* are then stored into the *Fabric Partition Virtual Space* 45.

25 At runtime, as shown in Fig. 4, the *Virtual Partitions* are copied through a chain of memory devices to reach the real *Fabric Partition* 19 for execution. the memory devices are represented in Fig. 4 by the *Fabric Partition Virtual Space* 45. These memory devices are lined up in their order of latencies 46 and provide a *pathway* that stages the movement of fabric *Configuration Bits* "just in time" for their execution. In the present invention, this *pathway* may be made-up of any
30 combination of storage devices, including hard disk 47, system main memory 48,

dedicated external SRAM 49, dedicate on-chip buffer memory 49, and on-chip *Configuration Cache* 49, depending on software program throughput requirements. The general idea is that the slower the access time of the storage device, the greater the storage units (or *staging slots*) within each level of the *Virtual Space Pyramid* 45. (see indicator 50). The final stage of the *pathway* is on the fabric in an area known as the *Shadow Configuration Memory*, also called *Docking Planes* 51. *Docking planes* allow loading of the *next-call* function in the background while *Fabric Partitions* are executing current *Function Calls* from the *Active Plane* 52.

Referring to Fig. 5, the memory storage unit within the *pyramid* taken by a *Virtual Partition* is called a *staging slot*. The combined *slots* of all storage devices in the *pathway* form the *pyramid* of staging paths as shown in Fig. 4. *Virtual Partitions* move up and down the *pyramid*, based on the urgency of their time of need. A *Virtual Partition* may occupy a chain of *slots* across the *stage* hierarchy. The highest stage at a given instance of the chain is called the *rank* of the *Virtual Partition*, and its *slot location* at that *rank* is called the *position* of the *Virtual Partition*. Fig. 5 shows examples of *Virtual Partitions* moving within the *pyramid*. To move a *Virtual Partition* up a *rank* in the *pyramid*, its bit image at the current *position* is copied over to a free *slot* 51 in the next *rank*, while the copy at its current *position* is left untouched (52). To move a *Virtual Partition* down a *rank*, the system simply retracts back to its previous *rank* and *position*, and the current *slot* is re-cycled.

Under this *pyramid* structure, a *Virtual Partition* is given an attribute called *stage latency*. *Stage latency* is the composite access times of all devices from current *stage* to the top of the *pyramid*. Applying the "just-in-time" principle, the system and method attempt to place a *Virtual Partition* in a *rank* such as:

$$(1) \quad \text{stage latency}(\text{rank}) < \text{expected time of need} < \text{stage latency}(\text{rank} - 1)$$

Ideally, there would be sufficient *staging slots* in every hierarchy level of the *pathway* to keep *Virtual Partitions* all within reach. In general, *slot* capacity is less and less to the top (53) and consequently, many *Virtual Partitions* may compete for available free *slots* in a given hierarchal *stage*. When this happens, the system
5 prioritizes the candidate *Virtual Partitions* in accordance with their expected *payback*, which reflects the improved throughput that can be expected from *Hard Execution*. *Payback* is calculated as the product of the following three factors:

- Probability* , of getting called next
- Hard-Duration*, the average duration in *Hard Execution*
- 10 *Speed-up*, the performance gain factor in *Hard* vs. *Soft Executions*

Out of the three factors, the first two are re-evaluated dynamically. The third remains static to its initialized value, except in *Training Mode*. In *Training Mode*, an option can be set to execute in parallel both *Soft* and *Hard* implementations, thus, allowing real-time evaluation of the third factor.

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Staging Storage Addressing

Fig. 6 shows the addressing and staging dynamics of *Virtual Partitions* in the *pyramid*. In an exemplary embodiment of the present invention, the *position* of a *Virtual Partition* in the above-mentioned *pyramid* is locatable using a chain of
20 ***address words*** (54-58). An *address word*, containing *rank* 59, *slot position* 60, *link* 61, and other fields as shown in Fig. 6, uniquely addresses the location of a *staging slot* where the bit contents of a *Virtual Partition* is stored. As shown in Fig. 6, one particular field is a pointer 61 linking to its *address word* at a preceding *rank*. There is one *address word* in the system main memory of the *pathway* for every storage
25 *slot* in the system. Free *slots* at each *rank* are chained together for recycling. Maintained with an address-word are four access-control flags shown in Fig. 8:

- Valid*** indicates the validity of the *Configuration Bits* copied at the location,
- Lock*** prohibits the recycling of the *slot location* until it is unlocked,
- 30 ***Park*** indicates staging end-point; hardware takes over here on, and

Persistent indicates the location is permanent and never reassigned.

With these flags, a wide range of staging storage arrangements can be supported. A given reconfigurable computing system may include on-chip staging resources, e.g. *Configuration Buffer* shown in Fig. 4, *Configuration Cache*, and *fabric* etc., that are directly managed by system hardware. The method described in the present invention is general enough to allow these hardware stages to be either visible or transparent from scheduling. For instance, a *Configuration Cache*, capable of fetching *Configuration Bit* data directly from system memory; can have the *park* flag set so that scheduling stops at the *Configuration Cache* level and the remainder of the *Virtual Partition* movement is controlled by hardware. Alternatively, the flag may be set off to allow the scheduling system direct control over its *caching algorithm*.

Similarly, some or all *Virtual Partitions* may be preloaded into system memory initially with their *persistent* flag set. This will guarantee the access latency of these *Virtual Partitions* can be no worse than the storage device's *staging latency* in which the *Virtual Partition* was pre-loaded into.

20 System Tables

In an exemplary embodiment of the present invention, several system tables are maintained to model and monitor the dynamics of *Function Calls*; and schedule the staging of their corresponding *Virtual Partitions*. Among them, the two main ones are the *Function Call Table (FCT)* and *Virtual Partition Map (VPM)*. Exemplary embodiments of the *FCT* and *VPM* are shown in Fig. 7 and Fig. 8 respectively.

As shown in Fig. 7, *FCT* 62A has one entry 62B per each *Function Call* (Func-A, Func-B,...etc.) in a given software program. In a general case, a *Function Call* may include one or more *Fabric Calls*; a *Fabric Call* may utilize one or more

Partitions; and each *Partition* may consist of one or more repetitive tiles of *Reconfigurable Logic Fabric*. In an exemplary embodiment of the present invention, every *Partition* is of identical shape and size; and all *Fabric Calls* within a *Function Call* are scheduled together, even though a *Fabric Call* may be invoked
5 in multiple instances of *Function Calls*.

Each *FCT* entry 62B portrays the execution behavior of the associated *Function Call*, as shown in Fig. 7, providing key information in the following fields:
next-calls (63) - the linked list (using the "list pointer" field 64) of probable next
10 *Function Calls* following current call, each node in the list contains the following information:
next-call-id (65) - the identification of the probable *next-call*,
probability (66) - the probability of actually being called next,
time-gap (67) - the separation in time between the two calls in succession;
15 *speed-up* (68) - the performance gain factor of the function in *Hard Execution* (*Fabric Partitions* involved) vs. *Soft Execution* (*Fabric Partitions* not involved);
hard-duration (69) - the length of time in *Hard Execution*;
macro-set (70) - the list of the included *Fabric Calls*, presented in the form of their
20 corresponding *VPM* indices.

This data is used to schedule *Function Calls*, lining up the associated *Virtual Partitions* in pace with their probable times of invocation. The list of *next-calls* 63 implements a variation of *branch prediction*, where *prediction* is drawn on an
25 empirical and adaptive basis. The *speed-up* 68 and *hard-duration* information 69, on the other hand, provide the basis for (*Soft* vs. *Hard Execution*) tradeoff evaluation. The *macro-set* 70 tells where to look for the *Fabric Calls* included and indexes to the *VPM*.

Fig. 8 shows the second system table *Virtual Partition Map (VPM)* 71A which has an entry 71B for every unique *Fabric Call* (vPart-A, vPart-B, ...vPart-Z) in the software program. Each entry, as shown in Fig. 8, contains the following fields:

- 5 **locator** 72 – points to the *address word* 73 at its present **rank** 74.
- tenure** 75 – shows the desired **rank** 76 for its sequent movement.
- call-id** 77 – links back to *Function Call* in the *FCT*.
- in-demand** 78 – tracks in real-time, for scheduling purpose, the *in-demand* status anticipated for the specific Partition:
- 10 **time-window** 79 – provide the upper and lower bounds of the time of need:
 - time-to-enter** 80 – the anticipated earliest time of activation
 - time-to-leave** 81 – the anticipated latest time of deactivation.
 - touched** 82 – a flag that is reset at the beginning of *Demand Look-Ahead*
 - prediction** 83 – sums up, over all probably threads of *Function Calls*, the
 - 15 composite *Probability* of being activated within the *time window*.
 - opportunity** 84 – similar to *prediction*, sums up the composite *payback* that can be anticipated from *Hard Execution*.

Also shown in Fig. 8 is the linking information of the physical location of the
20 **Configuration Bits** in the staging memory devices. For instance, as shown in Fig. 8 there are three devices, e.g., Rank 1 device, Rank 2 device, Rank 3 device, each showing the number of the *slot location* in the ranked devices (i.e., slot #1, slot #2..., slot #m).

25 **Statistical Modeling of Function Calls**

In one exemplary embodiment of the present invention, the two system tables are pre-initialized based on benchmark data. A *profiling* method such as described in U.S. Patent No. 5,966,534, can be used to analyze the benchmark data for patterns and statistics on the *activation sequence* of *Function Calls* (Fig. 3). In
30 another embodiment of the present invention, no analytical profiling is required.

Instead, the system simply tracks over a history of benchmark runs what *Function Calls* are most likely to be called next following the activation of a given current *Function Call*. The established pair-wise statistical relationship between the current and the *next-call Function Call* is stored in a corresponding *FCT* entry as shown in
5 Fig. 7.

This *Statistical Model* is the basis for "ranking" the *tenure* of all *Virtual Partitions* within the next stretch of time following the activation of a specific *Function Call*. Any rare cases *next-call* can be ignored in this method without
10 causing a concern over program stall or system throughput degradation. The *Model* can be kept compact; at the same time, the *profiling* method is simplified.

The *Statistical Model* is loaded from a database at initialization time. In one embodiment, several such *Models* are prepared, each corresponding to a particular
15 path or phase in a software program. During the course of its execution, a software program may switch to an alternative *Statistical Model* via a ***Load-Function-Call-Table*** statement, devised specifically for such a purpose. This type of arrangement can improve the relevancy of the *Models*, since their statistic contents are generated with more precise and narrowed focus. Arrangement as such allows manual fine-
20 tuning of the system for optimal throughput.

Adaptive Modeling of Function Calls

Statistical Models alone have limitations. Statistics, if kept static, can miss peak-and-valley situations and steer the scheduling inadequately. In the present
25 invention, quantities such as *hard-duration*, *time-gap*, and *next-call probabilities* are adjusted dynamically, adapting to the latest history. In the current invention, the calculations for adaptive adjustments are kept simple to minimize overhead. One exemplary *adaptive algorithm* of such is described below:

30

Let reduction fraction $f = 1/n$, where n is an empirical and real number equal or greater than 2, specified by the user.

The adaptive evaluation for the hard-duration can be expressed as:

5

$$(2) \quad \text{Hard-duration} \leftarrow \text{Hard-duration} * (1-f) + \text{latest Hard-duration} * f$$

Hard-duration is re-evaluated at the end of a *Function Call*. Likewise, at the beginning of a *Function Call*, *time-gap* is updated with the latest data as follows:

10

$$(3) \quad \text{Time-gap} \leftarrow \text{Time-gap} * (1-f) + \text{latest Time-Gap} * f$$

At the same time, *Probability* values for the *next-calls* to follow the current *Function Call* are re-evaluated as follows:

15

$$(4) \quad \text{Initialize } R \text{ to } 1;$$

For (all i in the next-calls) {

$$\text{probability}(i) \leftarrow \text{probability}(i) * (1 - f);$$

$$R \leftarrow R - \text{probability}(i);$$

20

$$\text{probability}(\text{current-call}) \leftarrow \text{probability}(\text{current-call}) + R$$

}

The calculations above can be further simplified by taking out the second equation and replacing R in equation (4) with the constant f . The calculation of R , however, is necessary to keep numerical round-off in check, when integer arithmetic is used. When restricting n to a binary whole number ($n = 2, 4, 8, \dots$), in one exemplary embodiment, the above *adaptive algorithm* can be efficiently implemented in hardware, replacing multiplication with binary shift operations.

25

Scheduling Schemes

Under the methods devised in the present invention, the scheduling for the execution of *Function Calls* in reconfigurable fabric is synthesized into the staging of *Virtual Partitions* through a *pyramid* of storage *slots* (Fig. 4) such that they would
5 be ready in place when the software program calls their number. The bulk of processing for staging is done in the background, when the embedded processor is free and would otherwise be idle. The system overhead is, thus, kept to a minimum.

In the present invention, the scheduling tasks are broken up into six
10 ***concurrent processes***, five of which are shown in Fig. 9A. These *processes*, communicate only through the *FCT* and *VPM* system tables and run independently in the background whenever the embedded processor is freed up. They are invoked upon specific events through either an interrupt or a message polling mechanism. The interrupt or message polling mechanism, in turn, initiate common ***runtime***
15 ***service routines***, kept in a ***Runtime Services Library***, for system level tasks. For instance, in one embodiment, run time services routines include copying a *Configuration Bit* stream, activating a *Fabric Partition*, etc. The six *concurrent processes* are:

- 20 1. **Demand Look-Ahead.** At the event a *Function Call* is invoked in the software program, this process is triggered to re-evaluate *demand status* in the *VPM*, starting off from its list of *next-calls* registered in the *FCT*. By traversing the *next-calls* lists recursively, the system analyzes the demands several steps ahead, thus the availability of the *Virtual Partitions* can be
25 staged more effectively.
2. **Tenure administration.** At the completion of *Demand Look-Ahead*, this process is invoked to upgrade the rating in *tenure* of all *Virtual Partitions*. The heuristics used in the rating could be scripted by users.
3. **Stage De-Queuing.** The *De-Queuing* process relieves storage *slots*
30 from top *rank* down, one *rank* at a time, where their current tenant's *tenure*

can no longer justify its *rank*. The *address words* of the relieved *staging slots* are returned to the "available" list of the *rank*, the *locator* of the *Virtual Partition* is backtracked to the previous *address word*.

4. **Stage En-Queuing.** The *En-Queuing* process allocates from an available list, one *rank* at a time, *stage slots* for *Virtual Partitions* with *tenure* higher than its *rank*. The allocated *slot* is now linked on top of the new tenant's *locator* with the corresponding *valid* flag turned off. At this time, a request is issued to a *runtime service routine* to have the contents copied over to the scheduled stage from its current location. At the successful completion of the copying, the *valid* flag is turned back on.

5. **Adaptive Reduction** (of the call history of the current *Function Call*). In the event a *Function Call* is concluded, the *adaptive algorithm* described above is applied to update the statistics in the *FCT* for the current function. At the same time, the *next-call* relationship between this and the previous *Function Call* is updated, or established if not previously included.

6. **Global Fine Tuning:** This process is initiated periodically to analyze the overall performance of the system, e.g. *hit-to-miss* ratio for *Hard Executions*, *slot utilization* of *staging devices*, *system overhead*, etc., and adjust the *greediness* parameters in various algorithms accordingly.

In one embodiment of the present invention, invocations of *processes* such as *Tenure Management*, *Stage De-Queuing*, and *Stage En-Queuing* are set up to execute progressively in finer steps, called *incremental tasking*. In this scheme, as shown in Fig. 9B, the process trio runs in a loop, stepping through the stages or levels of the *pyramid* one *rank* at a time. This finer division of scheduling tasks improves system efficiency.

1) **Demand Look-Ahead**

In a preferred embodiment of the scheduling method, the staging of *Virtual Partitions* is orchestrated by an implementation of *Demand Look-Ahead*. Basically,

the system explores the *next-calls lists* 63 (Fig. 7) to the *K-th* recursion starting from the current function, to access the demands on *Virtual Partitions* *K* steps ahead. *K* is referred to as the ***look-ahead depth***, it is one of the parameters that the user may use to control the ***greediness*** of the scheduling algorithms. The fan-out tree of *next-calls* shown in Fig. 10 illustrates traversing the *next-calls* lists to *K-th* recursion. Every trace from the ***root*** (i.e. the current function, Function A) to a given node (not just leaf nodes) in the tree forms a ***thread***, which relates a *next-call* relationship in n ($1 \leq n \leq K$) steps remove between the node (at the end of the trace) and the *root*. A *thread* is said ***reachable***, if the ***lead-time*** of each *Virtual Partition* involved is within its anticipated ***time of need***. The ***lead-time*** of a *Virtual Partition* equates to the ***staging latency*** at its ***rank***.

For each possible *thread*, the compounded scores of the *next-call* statistics, namely, ***time-gap***, ***probability***, and ***speed-up*** (those kept in *FCT*), are evaluated. The composite scores over all ***reachable threads*** to a given *Virtual Partition* are kept in *VMP* as are the corresponding ***time-window***, ***prediction***, and ***opportunity***. Notice that a given *Virtual Partition* may be reached via multiple *threads*, and even from itself. In one exemplary embodiment, the evaluation of the ***time-window*** is described as follows in C-like syntax:

```

20
(5)  DEFINE time-of-needi = time-of-needi-1 + durationi + time-gapi
      DEFINE durationi = (reachable ? hard-duration : hard-duration * speed-up)

      DEFINE reachablei = (time-of-needi-1 + time-gapi) > lead-timei
25      DEFINE lead-timei = staging-latency[nodei -> rank]

      node TRAVERSE (thread, j) /* a recursive function */
      {
30          last-node = top-of-stack(thread)
          next-list = last-node -> next-calls in FCT

          for each (node in next-list) {
              j = j + 1
              push node into thread

```

```

    If ( $j < K$ )  $node = TRAVERSE(thread, j)$ 

     $VP-list = node \rightarrow macro-set \text{ in } FCT$ 
    for each ( virtual-partition in  $VP-list$  ) {
5      if ( $reachable == false$ ) continue
      if ( $touched == true$ ) {
           $touched = false$ 
           $time-to-enter = time-of-need$ 
           $time-to-leave = time-of-need + duration$ 
10     } else {
           $time-to-enter = MIN(time-to-enter, time-of-need)$ 
           $time-to-leave = MAX(time-to-leave, time-of-need + duration)$ 
    )
      }
15     }
    pop node out of thread
     $j = j - 1$ 
  }
  return last-node
20 }

void main()
{
  Stack thread = { root-node }
25  integer j = 0

  reset time-window touched flags
  if ( $TRAVERSE(thread, j) \neq root$ ) error-exit

30 }

```

In the description above, it is more aggressive to evaluate the *time-to-enter* and *time-to-leave* independently. Alternatively,

35 (5-1) $time-to-leave = time-to-enter + duration$

Similar, the *prediction* is scored as the *sum over reachable threads* of the compounded *probability* along the *thread*, and *opportunity* the net expected
40 *payback*, as follows:

$$(6) \quad \textit{prediction} = \sum_{\textit{Reachable Threads}} (\prod_{\textit{nodes-in-thread}} (\textit{probability}))$$

$$(7) \quad \textit{opportunity} = \textit{prediction} * (\textit{speed-up} - 1) * \textit{hard-duration}$$

5 For a more elaborated *look-ahead* scheme, two additional analyses may be incorporated. Firstly, there is a possibility of *conflict of opportunity*. That is, a partition occupying critical storage *slots*, e.g. *Configuration Cache*, may block out a *next-call* partition from being reachable. This would be undesirable if the lost opportunity in the latter case out weighs the gain in the former case. This analysis is to impose a cost functions over critical staging resources. Secondly, the *greediness* of scheduling can be made to be adaptive to global statistics real time, such as *staging slot* congestion, percentage of schedule miss, etc.

2) Tenure administration

15 In the present invention, at completion of *Demand Look-Ahead*, the system schedules an execution, referred as a *task*, of *Tenure Management* in a ***Task Request Queue (TRQ)***. Whenever the embedded processor is idle, the system wakes itself up, and invoke a task FIFO off *TRQ*. The *Tenure Management* process sorts in **ascending** order the entries in *VPM* to a priority-ordered list. The sorting is based on a *figure of merit*, calculated off a generic ***weighting function*** as follows:

$$\textit{merit} = a / (\textit{time-to-enter} - \textit{time}()) + b * \textit{opportunity} + c * \textit{prediction}$$

25 A scripting mechanism can be provided to allow users specify the co-efficiencies *a*, *b*, and *c*, or even define their own *weighting function*. In practice, motivated by keeping system overhead minimal, only one of the triple variables (*a*, *b*, *c*) is set with a non-zero value. For example, when (*a*, *b*, *c*) is set:

(1, 0, 0): the order is ***temporal***, reflecting the urgency of a *Hard Function* in demand.

30 (0, 1, 0): the order is ***probabilistic***, reflecting the certainty of a

Hard Function being called soon.

(0, 0, 1): the order is *opportunistic*, reflecting the potential of gain in system throughput.

5 All these orderings are assumed to be ascending. In one embodiment of the present invention, all three orderings described above are prepared. Different algorithms use a different ordering that makes best sense. For example, it makes sense to process *tenure* in *temporal* order, since the demands at the top of queue need to be looked at first. Similarly, *probabilistic* ordering makes sense for *Stage De-Queuing*, since resources least likely needed ought to be freed up first. Likewise, *opportunistic* ordering makes sense for *Stage En-Queuing*, since the ultimate goal is to improve the system throughput. Moreover, the ordering chosen for each algorithm can be specified by users, so as to work out empirically a best strategy for the underlying software program.

15 At the prescribed ordering, the *tenure* of a given *Virtual Partition* is set according to the *just-in-time* principle, i.e. to the *rank* that satisfies the inequality in Equation (1). In one embodiment of the present invention, in conjunction with the notion of *incremental tasking* described above (shown in Fig. 9B), *tenures* are processed as follows:

20 *for* (*rank* = 1, *count* = 0, *j* = 0; *j* < # of partitions; *j*++) {
 vp = *temporal-order*[*j*]
 if (*time-to-enter*[*vp*] < *staging latency* [*rank*+1]) {
 25 *tenure*[*vp*] = *rank*
 count = *count* + 1
 } *else* {
 wake-up Stage De-Queuing (*rank*, *count*)
 wait (*completion of Stage En-Queuing* (*rank*))

```

rank = rank + 1
if (rank >= rank of the persistent stage) exit
count = 0
}

```

5

}

3) Stage De-Queuing

The *De-Queuing* process examines if there are enough free *slots*, at a given *rank*, to accommodate the all *Virtual Partition* at a specific *tenure*. When free *slots* are fewer than needed, the following actions are taken to match supply with demand:

10

Checking from a linked list maintained per each stage device, any *slot*, whose *tenant* (*Virtual Partition*) is with a *time-to-leave* being less than the wall clock time, is freed up. The current tenant is therefore demoted to the next *rank*.

15

If more *slots* need to be found, check from the same list to free up any *slot* whose *tenant* having a *time-to-enter* being zero or greater than the wall clock time. This de-allocates *slots* no longer in need. If still more *slots* need to be found, the demand side is suppressed to match the supply. This is done by dropping *Virtual Partitions* from *tenure* promotion in accordance with the *probabilistic* ordering.

20

The *De-Queuing* process is active when triggered by the *Tenure Management* process. The *En-Queuing* process is then subsequently triggered when the *De-Queuing* process frees up sufficient *slots* for new tenants. When *incremental tasking* is incorporated, the execution of *processes* 2, 3, and 4 shown in Fig. 9A is iterated on a per *rank* basis.

25

4) Stage En-Queuing

The *En-Queuing* process, traversing the *VPM* in ascending *opportunistic* ordering, promotes *Virtual Partitions* whose *rank* is lower than its *tenure* up a *rank*

30

above its current *rank*. The Promotion is done by allocating a free *slot* in a next *rank* and initiating a proper channel program, e.g. DMA channels, to copy the *Configuration Bits* over to the newly allocated *slot*. The copying is done in the background in the mix of other scheduling tasks. At the completion of copying, the
5 channel program marks the copy in the new *slot* as *valid*.

In cases where a *Virtual Partition* has a *tenure* more than one *rank* above its current *rank*, the *En-Queuing* process is re-iterated multiple times to accomplish the full promotion. However, with sufficient depth in the look-ahead process, this re-
10 iteration is, in general, unnecessary. The staging of a *Virtual Partition* is generally initiated soon enough, where promotions of more than one *rank* should not be needed at a time. Re-iteration, however, can be forced by users as one of the *greediness* options that a user can choose.

When *incremental tasking* is in effect, as an alternative exemplary embodiment, the re-iteration is enabled by default, however, the procedure involved is modified slightly. The *En-Queuing* process is iterated (as illustrated in Fig. 9B) from top to bottom, *rank* by *rank*. At each iteration, the process looks to promote *Virtual Partitions* with *tenure* higher than both the *rank* of iteration and its current
20 *rank*. This means that the *En-Queuing* needs are examined from the top *rank* down to a *rank* of the iteration at each iteration. While the promotion is still being done one *rank* at a time, a *Virtual Partition* has the chance to eventually be fully promoted. For instance, a *Virtual Partition* currently at *rank* 4 and with a *tenure* 2 will be copied to *rank* 3 at iteration 3, then to *rank* 2 at iteration 4. This procedure is
25 superior since it is as *greedy* as time would permit. If the execution of the current *Function Call* lasts long enough, sufficient free time of the embedded processor will be available to complete the *incremental tasking*. However, if the tasking procedure gets terminated prematurely, as it would be at the beginning of a next *Function Call*, the unfinished portion of the tasks are always the less significant portion. The

partial result is usable and effective.

5) Adaptive Reduction

At the conclusion of a *Function Call*, the statistic entries: *hard-duration*,
5 *time-gap*, and *probability*, in *FCT* for the call prior to the current call are updated
based on the *Adaptive Reduction* scheme described above (refer to Equation (2), (3)
and (4) for details). The statistics are thus changed and adapted to current execution
patterns. In addition, the following actions take place:

10 A probable *next-call* listed with a given *Function Call* will be
dropped from the list, if miss the call frequent enough, when the
associated *probability* is reduced below a threshold.
The current call will be added to the *next-calls* list if it is not there
already.

15 Optionally, the system will monitor and log system efficiency in items such
as: *hit-to-miss* ratio for *Hard Execution*, *congestion factor* in each
staging device,

Optionally, the *time-windows* are reset for the current *next-call* tree (details
are given in below).

20 Up until now, for simplistic reason, the discussion so far implies that only
one *Function Call* is active at a given time. Although this could still be the case for
certain software programs, it is, in general, not a reasonable assumption. For one
thing, the *partitions* of *Reconfigurable Logic Fabric* can run independently of either
25 other, thus, allowing multiple channels or parallel processing. For another, a
compiler, employing techniques such as loop unfolding and others, can optimize
performance by setting up parallel *threads* of code execution in the *reconfigurable*
fabric.

30 As the consequence, we need to consider multiple *Function Calls* being

active concurrently. When this is this case, multiple *next-call fanout trees*, one proliferated from the *active call*, are maintained in parallel. The schemes described so far in the present invention supports *Concurrent Function Calls* as well, needing only a few minor modifications.

5

In the present invention, *scheduling*, or rather *staging*, of *Virtual Partitions* is divided up in incremental and self-contained units. Multiple instances of each of those units can be fired up simultaneously from different *fanout trees*. Each of these instances is managed as a *task* in a *multi-tasking* environment. A *TRQ* is set up to
10 "pipeline" the execution of these scheduling tasks. Each of the *concurrent calls* can stack a series of *tasks* into the queue, and the system will pull them out of the FIFO. The tasks refer to the same *FCT* and *VPM* system tables. It should be understood that some mechanism must be provided to prevent these tasks from interfering with each other.

15

In one embodiment of the present invention, concurrent *Function Calls* are supported with additional provisions as follow:

The *time windows* in *VPM* are not reset in the event a *Function Call* becomes activated. Instead, at the conclusion of a *Function Call*, the
20 *fanout tree* proliferated from the call is traversed again to have the corresponding fields of *time windows* reset.

Semaphores are employed to provide a lock mechanism that serializes the updates made to each and any *FCT* and *VPM* entries.

A new field called *tree-id* mask is added to *VPM*, which allows each
25 concurrent call to mark its own *fanout tree* using one bit of the mask. e.g. A 32-bit mask can support up to 32 active concurrent calls. Meanwhile, a *Virtual Partition* common to, for instance, two trees will have two of the bits turned on corresponding to the *tree-ids*.

Facilitated by the *tree-id* mask, the system can maintain one set of *temporal*,

probabilistic, and *opportunistic* orderings for each concurrent call.

6) **Global Fine-Tuning**

In one enhancement embodiment of the present invention, a *Global Fine-Tuning* task is initiated by the system periodically to self-evaluate the systems own efficiency, and adjust accordingly the *greediness* of the *processes* involved. Some exemplary Global Fine-Tuning schemes are as follow:

The system can increment the *look-ahead depth* when the *hit-to-miss* ratio is below a lower bound, and decrement when device *congestion* is above a upper bound.

The system can adjust the reduction factor f used in Equation (2) to (4) automatically based on the *hit-to-miss* ratio.

The system can maintain the *next-calls* statistics kept in *FCT*, namely, *hard-duration*, *time-gap*, and *speed-up*, in a pair of bounds.

The system can adjust automatically the percentage point these values are referred.

Self Training Mode

In the present invention, all facilities enable a system being brought up cold with no *initial Call History Model*, and work its way to establish the *Statistical Model* on-the-fly. This capacity allows the system to support a *Training Mode*, where more details are analyzed and more history logged, at the expense of running at a slower pace. In one embodiment, the option of parallel (*Hard* and *Soft*) *Function Call executions* is turned on in *Training Mode* to allow evaluation of *speed-up* factors. In an exemplary embodiment of the *Self Training Mode*, the following additional analysis and history keeping are included:

The frequency of *Global Fine-Tuning* evaluation is increased.

The statistics are generated over a history not just an instance. This means an audit trail is maintained for each pair of *consecutive*

Function Calls, and the statistics kept in *FCT* are evaluated form this

audit tail each time.

The system can dump a snapshot copy of the *Model* to a secondary storage medium, and retrieve it back as an initial *Model*, or to continue the self training process.

5

In addition, the system can maintain *profiling statistics* covering the *Soft Executions*, which can give hints on additional *Hard Functions*.

10 In the preceding description, numerous specific details are set forth, such as specific system structures or elements in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. It will be apparent, however, to one skilled in the art that these specific details need not be employed to practice the present invention. In other instances, well known computing system elements or computing system processing have not been described in order to avoid unnecessarily obscuring the
15 present invention.

Moreover, although the components of the present invention have been described in conjunction with certain embodiments, it is appreciated that the invention can be implemented in a variety of other ways. Consequently, it is to be
20 understood that the particular embodiments shown and described by way of illustration is in no way intended to be considered limiting. Reference to the details of these embodiments is not intended to limit the scope of the claims which themselves recite only those features regarded as essential to the invention.